

# The approach

Lisa Oppenheim

*Analytic Engine*

7<sup>th</sup> April – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Preview: Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2016, 6 – 9pm

The Approach is pleased to present *Analytic Engine*, an exhibition of new work by American artist Lisa Oppenheim. The artist's interest in surface(s) and her rigorous investigation of materials interweave in her series, *Landscape Portraits*.

Oppenheim's practice is characterised by archival curiosity and intervention. Throughout her oeuvre, she explores historical imagery and renegotiates its materiality through techniques of the present. In her process of decoding and recoding, Oppenheim pursues her vested engagement with the image making process, interrogating and rethinking traditional methods, techniques, and materials of photography inside and outside the darkroom.

Bypassing the use of a camera, the photograms created by Oppenheim for *Landscape Portraits* are made by placing paper-thin veneers of wood directly on photographic paper. Sassafras, Purple Heart, and River Red are but a few of the species of trees Oppenheim employs: the light of the enlarger penetrates the veneers, transferring their natural patterns onto silver gelatin paper. This surface appropriation turns material into image. The photograms are held in custom-made frames that speak of their material origin: each frame is made of the type of wood used to create the contained image. The two- and four-part works generate their own indexical markers and become an inventory of the materials of their making.

Oppenheim draws a parallel between her darkroom process and photosynthesis, through which plants turn sunlight into energy that sustains their life and growth. Each wood grain print is made through exposure to the artificial light of the enlarger, rather than the sun; but both act as energies instigating creation.

The title of the series *Landscape Portraits* draws analogies with the art historically significant genres of both portraiture and landscape depictions. While the evocation of portraiture emphasises the unique patterns of growth evident in each veneer, the reference to landscape speaks of the forests in different continents that these woods originate from. Human activities of exploring, recording, and mapping the landscape were attempts to understand and control the complexities of nature, just as photography was a way to study and subjugate the depicted subject.

In the back room, Oppenheim continues to explore method processes and material disturbances. In the past, Oppenheim has focused on the use of textiles as negatives in the tradition of pioneering British photographer Henry Fox Talbot. Here, in a reversal of this working method of producing images from textiles, Oppenheim produces textiles from images, specifically from Seth Siegel's textile collection. Using a traditional Jacquard loom, she plays with the weaving process in the same way one would layering negatives in photographic production. However, this intervention causes the loom to jam during the weaving process, revealing segments where nothing is woven and therefore revealing only negative spaces in the pattern. Again, through this positive and negative relationship, Oppenheim draws a connection between the inherent principles shared between this technique and analogue photography.

**Lisa Oppenheim** (b. 1975, New York, USA) lives and works in New York City. She studied for a BA at Brown University in 1998, and later an MFA from the Milton Avery Graduate School for the Arts at Bard College in 2001, and is a graduate of the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program and the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam. In 2014 Lisa was the recipient of both the AIMIA|AGO Photography Prize from the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Shpilman International Prize for Excellence in Photography from the Israel Museum. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Hereditary Language*, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, France (2015); *La Quema*, Lulu, Mexico City, Mexico; *Forever Is Composed Of Nows*, Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany; *From Abigail to Jacob (Works 2004–2014)*, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, Austria (all 2014); *Heaven Blazing into The Head*, The Approach, London, UK (2013). Recent group exhibitions include: *Happy Ending*, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, France (2016); *Photo Poetics: An Anthology*, Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA; *wow! Woven? Entering the (sub)Textiles*, KM– Künstlerhaus, Halle für Kunst & Medien, Graz, Austria; *Light, Paper, Process: Reinventing Photography*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, USA (all 2015); *The New Photography*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA (2013).

For images or further information please contact Malik Al-Mahrouky: [malik@theapproach.co.uk](mailto:malik@theapproach.co.uk)